2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7
Toba SI17

T
763 ly refers to a custom already abandoned by the Tobas. It reminds us
766 of a similar custom of the Choroti who, as I have stated have been in the
171 habit of killing old, decrepit men with an arrow-shot in the heart to prevent them from reappearing as evil death-bringing spirits. The fact that, as Mr. Grubb relates, the Lenguas have been in the habit of burying hopelessly sick patients alive shows that such cruel customs have been wide-spread among the Chaco tribes. Its motives, as I have pointed out before, [1]) are to be sought in superstitious fear. Among all Indians the spirits of old men — especially those of medicine-men and sorcerers — are particularly feared. If such a person is allowed to die a natural death, this means that the evil spirit who caused the sickness has wholly taken possession of his soul, identified himself with it, and changed the departed Indian into an evil, destructive demon. This, according to the idea of the Indians, can be prevented by giving such a patient a violent death before he is killed by the disease-demon. [2])

M
751 Lastly, I may remark that there is not in the manipulations of the
755 medicine-man much that has the character of what we may call a »natural» cure, the only operations likely to give real relief being the massage of the sick spot and the suction, which in fact is sometimes so strong that it almost amounts to cupping. Various drugs and herbs are indeed used by the Chaco Indians for curative purposes and are not seldom alleged to have really healing effects [3]). These, however, are not exclusively used by the medicine-men; most elderly men seem to know about them. In the treatment of the professional medicine-men these remedies, curiously enough, seem to play but a subordinate part, magical conjurations being regarded as more important. — When a patient recovers in consequence of a medicine-man's »cure», as is not seldom the case, the phenomenon must first of all be ascribed to self-suggestion on the part of the patient, and the importance of this kind of »psychical treatment», in the case of primitive peoples, must not be underrated.

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[1]) See above, p. 112.

[2]) See below, p. 191.

[3]) Most »natural» remedies of the Chaco Indians are used for outward application, and they generally consist of decoctions made from certain leaves and roots. There is not much hygiene to be traced in the therapeutics of these Indians, nor do I believe that their remedies have much healing effect.

3: Metraux E-5 (1933) 1939 SI7 Mataco SI7

of their dreams. My informant, having dreamed that he was planting sugar-cane, intended to grow some.

Through the soul one knows what is going to happen. For instance, if one dreams that he shall be killed, it is likely that he is to die an unnatural death. If he is traveling about and dreams of home it is better to turn back. A man who is away from his wife can talk to her in the evening and she will see him in her dreams. It is the soul which walks about during the night. If one dreams of an algarroba or that he is working in a field, it means that he has still a long time to live. If during the absence of a member of the group someone dies, the absent one will dream about the dead person who appears to him naked. Generally when a traveler returns to his village there is no need to tell him of what has happened during his absence, for he is informed of everything through his dreams which occur when his soul returns to his family. Very often in dreams one sees dead relatives. The soul has gone to the underworld and paid them a visit. Sometimes the dead return by night to the houses of the living who then dream of the departed.

b) *Remedies*

The Indians call a certain fungus *ăxǫ̆lĕut*. According to them it is the excrement of the fox which towards morning transforms itself into a fungus. It is used as a remedy for scalding. A fragment of the plant is toasted, powdered, mixed with fat and the white of an egg and spread on the burned place. The fat and the egg white are desirable but not indispensable ingredients for in a pinch the toasted powder is sufficient. This same plant sometimes obturates the penis of a sick person and prevents him from urinating. If when sucking the sick man the medicine-man gets out a fragment of this plant it most certainly means that the patient will recover. When the extremity of a limb aches it is to be tied at intervals of about half an

3: Metraux E-5 (1933) 1939 SI7 Mataco SI7

inch; there the punctures are to be made until the blood flows. If a first treatment proves insufficient it must be repeated until loss of blood relieves congestion and eases the limb.

To stop a hemorrhage one must burn an old hat or some old rag and put the ashes on the wound. When one is pricked by a thorn one must suck the blood to prevent inflammation.

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